UNIVERSITY OF TORONTO
FACULTY OF MUSIC

University of Toronto Symphony Orchestra (UTSO)

Uri Mayer, *conductor*

Saturday, September 27, 2025 at 7:30pm | Tribute Communities Recital Hall, 83 York Boulevard

The UTSO concerts are made possible in part by a generous gift from Neville Austin.

PROGRAM

Overture to the Old World (2025)

Benjamin Gabbay (b. 1995)

Symphony No. 88 in G major (1787)

F.J. Haydn (1732–1809)

I. Adagio – Allegro
II. Largo
III. Menuetto: Allegretto
IV. Finale: Allegro con spirito

Intermission

Passacaglia and Fugue for Orchestra (1954)

Harry Somers (1925–1999)

Symphony No. 5, Op. 67 in C minor (1808)

L. van Beethoven (1770–1827)

I. Allegro con brio
II. Andante con moto
III. Scherzo: Allegro
IV. Finale: Allegro

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UNIVERSITY OF TORONTO SYMPHONY ORCHESTRA (UTSO)

Uri Mayer, *conductor*
Matheus Coelho do Nascimento, Lorenzo Guggenheim, Felipe Luzuriaga, Peter Min, Emma Colette Moss, *assistant conductors*

Violin I
Kai Schulz Rousseau, *concertmaster*
Katherine Chen
Caleb Chiu
Siri Ducharme-Leblanc*
Zelda Faulkes
Solana Frebold
Natasha Hendra
Lauren Da-Hyun Lee
Timothy Jin Seo Li
Sophie Reimer-Epp*
Sam Talebi
Esther Emari Van Rooi
Boyao (Bryan) Wang
Mizuki Yaesawa
Qiqi Zhang

Violin II
Elianna Van Raalte, *principal*
Bridget Alexander
Sharon Jin
Aura Kwon
Jamie Lee
Cameron Liao
Natalia (Natasha) Morozova
Kwan Heng Vincent Poon
Robert Yang
William Sale
Kasey Scoboria
Rosana Scopacasa
Hoi Ching (Audrey) Sung
David Xu

Viola
Meika Sonntag, *principal*
Dai Hao (Tony) Chen
Isla Ertl
Yinren (Gavin) Li
Gabriella Caitlyn Liu
Anahit Matevosyan
Samuel Rothermel
Viola Szakony

Cello
Xirui (Caitlyn) Liu, *principal*
Antonia Cambre
Maren Helyar
Sera Lee Hoiyan Law
Tzu-Chieh (Jill) Liang
Tuuli Olo
Yeojin (Chloe) Shin
Ryan Wu
Xinyu (Cindy) Zhang

Double Bass
Jordan Sirvin, *principal*
Jude Littlefield Buschlen
Wang Hin (Marcus) Chan
Sidney Hufton

Piccolo/Flute
Ethan Allaire
Rowan Froh
Lauren Radeschi
Rachel Roe-Wu*

Oboe
Jasmine Noone
Nicholas Pomares

English Horn
Clara Aristanto

Clarinet/Bass Clarinet
Cheng Cheng
Marco Ding
Andrzej Jozef Osko

Bassoon/Contrabassoon
Kelton Hopper*
Taran Massey-Singh
Kendal Morrison
Jaclyn Yee

Horn
Anik Caissie
Ethan Chialtas
Finn Parks
Evan Turner

Trumpet
Kevin Hayward
Grace Locker
Daniel Rofaiel

Trombone
Shaela Lundy
Amaya Sydor
Wenxiang (Andy) Wu

Tuba
Jack Shiels*

Timpani/Percussion
Jon Bilek
Cristobal Ignacio (Chris) Wang Yu (Arthur) Lo
Salazar Pereira
Jerry Yuan

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PROGRAM NOTES

Overture to the Old World by Benjamin Gabbay

Benjamin Gabbay (b. 1995) is a DMA student in composition at the University of Toronto Faculty of Music, studying under Norbert Palej. His creative activities find expression in three different but complementary areas: music (composition and piano performance), writing (he is the author of two fantasy novels), and digital design (from creating websites to video editing). He holds an ARCT diploma in piano performance from the Royal Conservatory of Music and earned his bachelor's and master's degrees in composition from the University of Toronto. His choral and instrumental compositions have been commissioned and performed by Arcady and Mississauga Summer Chorale, among others, and recognized by competitions including those sponsored by St. James Cathedral and Amadeus Choir. His music is praised for its adventurous spirit and emotional resonance, blending technical sophistication with lyrical accessibility. For more information about Gabbay, visit his informative website at https://benjamingabbay.com/.

The composer has supplied the following program note:

Overture to the Old World revolves around two distinct musical images: a lonely cry of atonement, depicted in the introduction as a chant rising up from the depths of the sea, and the voice that responds to that cry—an electrifying proclamation modelled after the Baroque French overture, traditionally a symbol for the arrival of royalty both earthly and heavenly. With the intermingling of these two themes and, ultimately, the ennobling of the chant melody, the work hearkens to the power of ancient truth and paints a journey through desolation to spiritual resurrection.

The introductory soundscape was inspired by a dream in which I observed the performance of a symphony inside a stone tower that stretched infinitely into the night sky and sat at the edge of the sea. The chant melody itself is offered as a wordless representation of the ancient Greek prayer "Kyrie eleison" ("Lord, have mercy"), with the climax of the phrase representing the shift to the second line of the prayer, "Christe eleison" ("Christ, have mercy").

Symphony No. 88 in G major (1787) by F.J. Haydn

Symphony No. 88 in G major, though it is not one of the 31 Haydn symphonies with a nickname, is rightly considered to be one of the composer's finest. In an entertaining article for the Classic FM website, the writer Daniel Ross ranked all of Haydn's symphonies by "greatness," placing No. 88 as the fifth best on his list. "Go straight to the second movement," Ross advised. "Listen to the oboe. Reflect on your life's failure to conjure anything quite as lovely as this." (Part of the loveliness of that theme is the orchestration; the solo oboe is doubled an octave lower by a solo cello.) Haydn uses the era's typical four-movement symphonic structure—a first movement in sonata form with a slow introduction, a lyrical slow movement of variations (on the oboe/cello theme), a minuet and trio for the third movement, and a lively sonata-rondo finale—but he suffuses these formal templates with extraordinary ingenuity and wit.

The slow introduction to the first movement features strategic use of silence and dynamics to create a sense of suspense and expectation. In the energetic movement which follows, Haydn deploys all manner of clever tricks to manipulate the listener's expectations. Accompanimental patterns and themes exchange places, the opening main theme turns upside-down and shape-shifts into the closing theme, and in the development section, Haydn wrings endless changes on the simplest of ideas, a rapidly undulating two-note semitone figure. The wonder of it all is that the movement is delightful at first hearing, but reveals endless depths the more one studies it.

The second movement offers beautifully orchestrated variations on the opening solo oboe/cello melody. The textures become increasingly elaborate, both rhythmically and texturally, with some surprising *fortissimo* outbursts to make sure no listeners nod off (he would refine this trick in the slow movement of his Symphony No. 94, the "Surprise"). In the third movement, Haydn nicely contrasts the refined courtly elegance of the outer framing minuet sections with the rustic earthy charm of the central trio, in which the solo oboe once again takes centre stage—this time joined by the violins instead of a solo cello.

The main theme of the finale combines ideas from the three previous movements: the upbeat figure of two eighth notes, and the rhythmic character in general, recall the opening of the Allegro section of the first movement; the scoring of the theme for violins and solo bassoon in octaves recalls the scoring of the themes from the opening of the second movement and the trio of the third movement; and the overall rustic character of the music recalls both the first and third movements. Haydn's unsurpassed musical wit is always on display in his rondos; in this case, he spins a good many jokes out of the simple two-note pickup figure—transforming that modest musical gesture into a source of delightful mischief.

***Passacaglia and Fugue for Orchestra (1954)* by Harry Somers**

Harry Somers (1925–1999) is a central figure in Canadian musical modernism. His catalogue of 150 works across orchestral, chamber, vocal, choral, and operatic genres reflects a remarkable versatility in both traditional and experimental idioms. Born in Toronto on September 11, 1925, Somers initially aspired to a career as concert pianist, but in his early 20s decided composition was his calling. He studied under John Weinzweig, later refining his craft with Darius Milhaud in Paris. His early works, of which Passacaglia and Fugue is an excellent example, synthesize contemporary idioms with eighteenth-century formal and textural procedures. An increasing engagement with music for voice in the 1960s culminated in *Louis Riel* (1967), a pivotal moment in Canadian opera. Somers was often heard as a broadcaster on CBC Radio, and he was the first composer appointed as a Companion of the Order of Canada. While the Canadian Opera Company's 2017 production of *Louis Riel* sparked a vigorous debate over issues of cultural representation, it also underscored the enduring significance of Somers's musical legacy to Canada's artistic and intellectual history. The centennial of his birth this month invites renewed scholarly attention and was the occasion for a symposium on his life and legacy that was held at the University of Toronto Faculty of Music earlier today.

Somers's Passacaglia and Fugue for Orchestra was written in 1954 at the request of the CBC producer Terence Gibbs for the recently formed CBC Symphony Orchestra. Unlike Bach's great Passacaglia and Fugue in C minor for organ, in which the closing double fugue is based on two subjects derived from the passacaglia theme, in Somers's work the passacaglia and the fugue are based on entirely different themes. The two movements are played without a break, as the last note of the final presentation of the passacaglia theme becomes a pedal over which the ensuing fugue subject is introduced. The passacaglia is slow and lyrical, with 14 repetitions of the following theme:

The fugue erupts with kinetic energy in Presto tempo and is based on a twelve-note series that not only provides the pitch content of the melodic lines but also determines the first pitch of the successive entries of the agitated fugue subject. (Somers used the same procedure in his String

Quartet No. 3 of 1959.) Both the Passacaglia and the Fugue movements rise to an intense climax via layered textures, rhythmic complexity, and inventive orchestration, showcasing Somers's compositional craft and creative imagination.

***Symphony No. 5 in C minor, Op. 67 (1808)* by L. van Beethoven**

Ludwig van Beethoven (1770–1827) cast a long shadow over later generations of composers—"You have no idea what it feels like always to hear the tramp of such a giant behind you," as Brahms noted—and his music has continued to resonate deeply with audiences from his day to ours. His nine symphonies may be interpreted as a dialectical exploration of the genre's richly varied expressive possibilities, with the lyrical and introspective even-numbered symphonies standing in contrast to the extroverted, dramatic character of the odd-numbered ones.

Beethoven's Fifth Symphony expanded the orchestral palette by adding the piccolo, trombone, and contrabassoon—all used exclusively in the climactic fourth movement. The Fifth traces a compelling narrative arc, evolving from the stormy struggles of the C minor opening movement to the resoundingly triumphant C major finale. The iconic opening four-note motif is one of the most instantly recognizable musical gestures in the world, instantly familiar to listeners across generations and cultures. It is even the subject of an entire book: Matthew Guerrieri's *The First Four Notes: Beethoven's Fifth and the Human Imagination* (2012). Guerrieri traces how the motive and the Fifth Symphony in general have been interpreted, politicized, and mythologized across the centuries, appearing in contexts as varied as revolutionary movements, wartime broadcasts, and pop culture.

The motive undergoes relentless development and transformation in the opening movement. Its terse urgency and dramatic propulsion drive the music ever forward; the motive also appears as a subtle accompaniment figure beneath the lyrical second theme.

The second movement is cast in variation form, with two contrasting themes—one noble and lyrical, first presented in the lower strings, the other more assertive featuring trumpets and tympani; subtle allusions to the first movement's rhythmic profile maintain a sense of continuity.

The third movement is a vigorous scherzo but its shadowy opening, marked by hushed strings and ominous horns, evokes a sense of mystery and suspense—"that endless longing which is the essence of romanticism" as E.T.A. Hoffmann put it in his famous review of the Fifth in 1810. The trio section introduces a lively fugato, and the return of the scherzo is transformed, leading without pause into the finale via a mysterious, suspenseful transition.

The fourth movement bursts forth in radiant C major, a tonal shift that signals the culmination of the symphony's dramatic arc. The expanded orchestration contributes to a sense of grandeur and exultation, affirming the work's overarching trajectory from darkness to light. As Lewis Lockwood in his *Beethoven's Symphonies: An Artistic Vision* (2015, p. 120) concludes, the Fifth is "a powerful message to the future about the courage and resilience of the human spirit."

-Program notes by Professor Robin Elliott

BIOGRAPHY

Uri Mayer, Professor and Director of Orchestral Studies at the University of Toronto since 2014, has taught on the faculties of the University of Michigan in Ann Arbor, Rice University Shepherd

School of Music in Houston, McGill University in Montreal and at the Glenn Gould School of the Royal Conservatory of Music (GGS).

Renowned for his strong command of broad symphonic, operatic, and ballet repertoire, Mayer has guest conducted many of the leading orchestras around the world including the Montreal, Toronto, Winnipeg and Vancouver symphonies in Canada, the Houston and Utah symphonies in the U.S.A., London Mozart Players and the English Symphony Orchestra, NDR Philharmonie in Hannover, Slovak Philharmonic, Budapest, Belgrade and Sophia Philharmonics, Israel Philharmonic, NHK Orchestra and Osaka Symphony in Japan and National Symphony of Taiwan. He served as the Principal Conductor of the Kansai Philharmonic Orchestra in Osaka, Japan and the Artistic Director of the Israel Sinfonietta. In Canada, Mayer was Music Director of the Edmonton Symphony and Orchestra London. He has led numerous opera productions in Canada, the U.S.A., the Netherlands, Hungary, and Israel including *The Barber of Seville*, *Così fan tutte*, *Don Giovanni*, *The Flying Dutchman*, *Salome* and *The Cunning Little Vixen*.

Some of the distinguished soloists who have collaborated with him include Elly Ameling, Kathleen Battle, Maureen Forrester, Frederica von Stade, Itzhak Perlman, Pinchas Zukerman, Peter Oundjian, Mstislav Rostropovich, Yo-Yo Ma, Claudio Arrau, Emanuel Ax and Sir András Schiff. Mayer has recorded for the Arabesque, CBC, Denon Japan, Hungaroton and Koch labels. Under his direction the Edmonton Symphony became one of Canada's most frequently heard orchestras on radio. They were awarded the Grand Prix du Disque-Canada for the recording *Orchestral Suites of the British Isles* and nominated for a Juno Award for *Great Verdi Arias* with Louis Quilico. In 2009, the University of Western Ontario conferred on Mayer a Doctor of Music Honoris causa in recognition of his contribution to the musical life in Canada.

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